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Reminiscences.

By Rembrandt Peale.

THE PERSON AND MIRE OF WASHINGTON.

AMONG the few persons now living, who can speak of their own impressions, and in regard to the judgments of others, concerning the personal appearance of Washington, I may be supposed to have some claim on the confidence of the rising generation—educated to venerate the memory of him, who will always be “first in the hearts of his countrymen.”

With a feeling similar to that which prompted the celebrated traveller CHATEAUBRIAND, in speaking of Washington’s presence, to exclaim, “There is a virtue in the looks of a great man!” the Abbe ROLIN, chaplain in the French army in 1781, writes: “I have seen General Washington, that most singular man—the soul and support of one of the greatest revolutions that has ever happened, or can ever happen. I fixed my eye upon him with that keen attention which the sight of a great man always inspires. We naturally entertain a secret hope of discovering in the features of such illustrious men some traces of that excellent genius which distinguishes them from, and elevates them above, their fellow mortals. Perhaps the exterior of no man was better calculated to gratify those expectations than that of General Washington. He is of a tall and noble stature, well proportioned; a fine, cheerful, open countenance; a simple and modest carriage, and his whole mien has something in it that interests even his enemies.”

My father, in a letter to his friend Edmond Jennings, London, who took an interest in everything American, wrote to him in 1775: “I am well acquainted with General Washington, who is a man of very few words; but when he speaks, it is to the purpose. What I have often admired in him is, that he always avoided saying anything of the actions in which he was engaged in the last war. He is uncommonly modest, very industrious and prudent.”

Doctor SOUTRAY, in his poem of the “Vision of Judgment,” appears to have imbibed the current idea of Washington’s character, as he thus introduces the Spirit of the Rebel Patriot Chief, in the case of George the third. I have taken the liberty to change the measure of his long lines, dividing each into two sections:

“Silently he stood,
And still unmoved and in silence,
With a steady mien,
Regarded the face of the monarch;
Thoughtful awhile he gazed;
Severe but serene was his aspect—
Calm but stern,
Like one whom no compassion could weaken,
Neither could doubt deter,
Nor violent impulse alter;
Lord of his own resolves,
Of his own heart absolute master—
Awful spirit!

His place was with ancient sages and heroes,
Fabius, Aristides, and Solon—
Epanomondas.”

May I be permitted to quote another poet? THOMAS MOORE, who was long enough in our country to have been better informed, mistook Washington’s known self-command

for coldness, and his undaunted bravery and success in battle he ascribed to *fatigue*; yet justly applauds his glorious forbearance to grasp at power, when offered to him. He thus addresses him:

TO WASHINGTON.

“How shall we rank thee upon glory’s page?
Thou more than soldier, and just less than sage!
Too formed for peace to act the conqueror’s part,
Too trained in camps to learn a statesman’s art,
Nature designed thee for a hero’s mould,
But, ere she cast thee, let the stuff grow cold!
While warmer souls command, may make their fate,
Thy fate made thee, and forced thee to be great;
Yet fortune, who so oft so blindly sheds
Her brightest halo round the weakest heads,
Found thee undazzled, tranquil as before,
Proud to be useful, scorning to be more;
Lest prompt at glory than at duty’s claim,
Renown the need, but self-applause the aim,
All thou hast been reflects less fame on thee,
Far less than all thou hast *forborne* to be!”

When Mrs. ROBERT MORRIS, widow of the great patriotic financier, visited my painting-room to see my portrait of Washington, she remained a long time seated before it, narrating many interesting anecdotes of the great original, with whom she and her husband were so much connected. Among them she dwelt upon the triumphal entry into New York, in the year 1784; and described the magnificent procession which passed before her residence in Broadway. Among her invited guests was the British Admiral Sir Peter Parker, an uncommonly handsome man, who commanded her and her compatriots for their admiration of the character and virtues of Washington, but remarked that “it was by no means necessary to think him equally possessed of manly beauty.” By this time the procession advanced, and at a pause in its movement, the General stopped just in front of her house, the balcony of which was filled with ladies. His horse, in prancing, turned about, and the General, with grace and dignity, saluted them. Sir Peter on entering the window, advancing to Mrs. Morris, exclaimed, “Madam, you are right—he is the finest looking man I ever saw!” Washington was her guest that evening, when Sir Peter’s impression was fully confirmed.

The Rev. Mr. WEEMS, who loved to narrate anecdotes of Washington, related to me an instance of his habitual politeness. A British Officer, after the Peace, on a visit to Mount Vernon, rode out with the General on the public road, discoursing on the state of agriculture. A negro boy, on the side path, stopped to gaze on him who commanded the attention of all, and respectfully uncovered his woolly head. Washington responded by raising his hat. “What!” said the British Officer, “surely you do not notice such creatures?” “I do not choose,” replied Washington, “that a negro should surpass me in politeness.”

This revives the artistic recollection of his polite respect to a *picture*. My father had invited the General to see some Indian figures dressed in their proper habiliments. A painting, which he had just finished, was placed in the room leading to the Indian department. The picture represented my elder brother, with palette on hand, as stepping up a stairway, and a younger brother looking down. I observed that Washington, as he passed it, bowed politely to the painted figures, which he afterwards acknowledged he thought were living per-

sons. If this *first* homage bestowed on the picture was not indicative of its merit, it was, at least, another instance of habitual *politeness*.

Mr. C. LESLIE, in his Hand-book, writes thus of this Picture: “Children and childish minds are attracted by wonders. I remember, when I was a boy, seeing a picture that was placed against a wall at the end of a long room, representing an open door, through which a flight of stairs receded, with the figure of a man, of the size of life, as if walking up them. At the base of the canvas a real step projected on the floor of the room, and at a certain distance it was impossible to distinguish between the painted stairs and the wooden one; indeed, so complete was the deception, that on first seeing it my wonder was at the *man’s* remaining stationary. This picture seemed to me perfection; and at that time I should probably have looked on the finest *Titian* with comparative indifference. It was, however, the work of a very ordinary painter.”

Whether Mr. Leslie, and others, are right in totally decrying all true representations of objects, as seen by the eye; and affirming that the *best* imitations of Nature are the *worst* pictures, leaving us to conclude that a charcoal sketch, inasmuch as it *imitates* nothing, is simply *suggestive* of something that may be *imagined*, though not seen, and must, therefore, be the perfection of Art, in the fancy of a theoretic amateur, is a question. Yet he might have treated the friend of his father with a little more respect; for C. W. Peale, the author of that unpretending picture, though he could not rival the “Transfiguration” by Raphael, nor the “Duchess and Sancho Panza,” by Leslie, was yet no very ordinary Painter, many of his portraits being equal to, and often mistaken for, those of his master, West.

COLONEL TRUMBULL told me that early one morning, before the Revolutionary contest, in the State-house Yard, he noticed three remarkably fine-looking men, walking in the Linden Avenue; and being especially desirous to hear who the middle person of the group was, followed him to Walnut Street to an Inn, for then we had no such thing as a Hotel. A person chanced to be at the next door, who informed Trumbull that the gentleman who was about to enter was Colonel Washington of Virginia. “Unquestionably the finest looking man,” said Trumbull, “I had ever seen!”

Colonel Trumbull’s full length portraits of Washington ought, therefore, to be the best representations of his figure, as it has been asserted they are. They did not so appear to me, when painted on the full size—but I have seen his small *original* study (shown to me by Mrs. J. Adams), which I thought deserved that praise. Trumbull having the use of but one eye, and that I believe near-sighted, was most successful in his beautiful small pictures.

Mr. STUART’s whole length of Washington, painted for the Marquis of Lansdowne, the head being copied from his original study (and not successfully), was painted at the residence of Wm. Smith, Esq., at the corner of Chestnut and Fifth Street. The time I well remember, because Mr. Stuart came over to my father in the Philosophical Hall, to know how he should color a wax hand, which he had moulded from his

own, and used to represent the right hand of Washington. Mr. Smith, a little man, told me that he stood for the figure—Mr. Stuart depending on his memory for the necessary variation. This was supposed, at the time, to be a sufficient apology for its not exactly representing the figure of the General. Mr. Stuart then informed me that his exact height was six feet and half an inch (it had been six feet, one inch, and in his boots something more) his weight was over two hundred.

My father painted the *first* portrait of Washington in 1772, when he was 41 years of age, in the full vigor of life. His whole length, painted during the War, represent the General with a short neck, broad but sloping shoulders, erect but easy and majestic, and a small abdominal fullness. His legs were not stout, which was ascribed to his constant use of boots, and taking little exercise except on horseback. His limbs were rather sinewy than muscular, and his hands remarkably large. The proportions in my father's whole lengths, I saw corroborated by means of a full suit of his Regiments, which he kindly presented to a member of our family who had taken a fancy to make a wax statue of him.

COLONEL THATCHER, in a letter to me, says—"The appearance of General Washington, when mounted on his lofty steed, was imimitably majestic and graceful." That lofty steed was long an object of interest to the numerous visitors at Mount Vernon; but becoming irksome to the General, he proposed to my father to accept this favorite animal, in connection with his Museum, and thus satisfy the public curiosity; but my father declined the offer, as interfering with his efforts then exclusively devoted to Natural History.

WILLIAM RUSH, our Philadelphia Carver, was at West Point whilst Washington and his suite held their winter quarters there. Mr. Rush took pleasure in telling me how long he watched Washington, playing at ball against a brick house on the plain, moving about with agility and striking the ball right and left, with great power. To mitigate the thirst of the players, an orderly brought on the ground a bucket of toddy; a heated and impatient young Colonel hastened to it, and raising the cup to his mouth, was about to drink, when Washington advanced, and, with a polite bow, taking the cup from the hand of the young man, said to him—"Your General first," thus showing the etiquette and subordination necessary in the army, notwithstanding the familiar footing on which they then stood.

"I saw him," says Mr. Rush, "dismount from his horse, a few hours after the battle of Princeton, and step upon a small mound by the way-side, with one thigh thrown across the notch of an old stump of a tree, reviewing with great anxiety his little band (which had just taken the British 17th Regiment), but in danger of being overtaken by an all powerful army. At that momentous crisis, his likeness would be worth more guineas than the British would have given for his person." This was the picturesque fancy of an Artist, but was certainly not the most imposing attitude for a heroic picture; yet Mr. Rush admired it because it was exciting, natural, and unpretending, and "more precious than gold."

B. H. LATROBE, the architect of the

Capitol, no ordinary judge of character, who visited Mount Vernon in 1797, writes—"Washington has something uncommonly majestic and commanding in his walk, his address, his figure, and his countenance. His face, however, is characterized more by intense and powerful thought, than by quick conception; there is a mildness about his expression, and an air of reserve in his manner, which lowers its tone still more. He is 65, but appears some years younger, and has sufficient vigor to last many years yet. He was frequently silent for many minutes, during which time an awkward silence seemed to prevail in the circle. His answers were often short, and he did not at any time speak with remarkable fluency; perhaps the extreme correctness of his language, which almost seemed studied, prevented that effect. He appears to enjoy a humorous observation, and made several himself. He laughed heartily several times, and in a very good-humored manner."

Notwithstanding our reverence for the habitual dignity and sedateness in the respect of Washington, which accorded with the rank he held among those who moved about him, and who were influenced by his authority, yet it is agreeable to our natures to know that he was susceptible of emotions like other men, although he subdued them, and made them obedient to his higher propensities. That he could give expression to his anger, was evident at the battle of Monmouth, and the siege of Yorktown; that he could be pleasant and familiar, as at West Point, we learn from Mr. Rush; that he indulged in humor, we know from Latrobe's visit to Mount Vernon; and I can bear testimony that he laughed heartily whilst he sat to me for his portrait.

So far, this imperfect sketch describes "the living man." Mr. STRICKLAND, the architect, assisted in the removal, in 1837, of the remains of Washington into the marble Sarcophagus, made by Mr. Struthers: he says, "At the request of Major Lewis, the fractured part of the lid was turned over, on the lower part, exposing to view a head and breast of large dimensions, which appeared, by the dim light of the candles, to have suffered but little from the effects of time. The eye-sockets were large and deep, and the breadth across the temples, together with the forehead, of unusual size."

INVENTIONS.—ODDS AND ENDS.

Sometimes ages intervene between any important discoveries, and again in one's lifetime succession and concentration of them may occur. With this view I shall call upon my recollection for a little incident in my early life, as it is connected, at least in my mind, with a series of most interesting facts.

In returning from school, I generally passed through the kitchen, and observing a plate of the hind legs of frogs (a favorite tit-bit of my father, who procured them himself, by spearing the amphibious swimmers that morning, on the borders of the streams near the city), I stopped to admire their whiteness and delicacy, as they floated in the liquid which appeared to have oozed from them. A salt-cellar was close by, and knowing that salt was used in the cookery, I took a pinch of it and sprinkled

it over the limbs, merely to watch how it would dissolve: in a few moments the legs began to move at their joints, with surprising muscular force. I ran into the parlor to get the family to step back and witness the wonder; but the legs were entirely still, and the family seemed to think me guilty of my *first* falsehood. I earnestly repeated what I had seen, and hoped that the salt might produce the effect again—it did with less vigor, but my credit for veracity was restored. This was in the year 1785.

It had not been long before this, that Franklin discovered the identity of electricity and lightning. With my elder brother I repeated his experiment with the kite; and, under a thunder-cloud, drew a spark from the suspended key. A few years subsequently, I was old enough to listen to the speculations of our most scientific men: they were agreed, wonderful as it seemed to them, that whilst other sciences were a long time arriving at maturity, Franklin had, after firing a cannon on one side of the Schuylkill, by means of wires from his Leyden Jars on the other side, shown or was supposed to have shown, that nothing more was to be discovered in electricity, although magnetism *might* possibly be some mysterious modification of it.

The incident of the frog's legs was riveted in my memory, when, some years after, the newspapers informed us of the surprise of the Italian Philosopher, *Galvani*, who, in dissecting a frog, observed a similar motion produced by his forceps and knife when in particular contact with a muscle and a nerve. This led to the invention of the galvanic battery. In London, in 1802, I was invited to the first exhibition by Professor *Adini*, nephew of *Galvani*, to show the wonderful power of a large galvanic battery, producing shocks which were thought similar to electricity; and, when in strong action, not only inflaming iron, copper, gold leaf, but even melting platinum. A large dog (recently killed) was placed on the table in a crouching posture, his hind feet resting against a stick that was nailed across, and his fore paws projecting over the edge of the table. A portion of the skin of his thigh was laid open, exposing the principal muscle and an important nerve. A wire from one end of the battery was made to touch the muscle, and another, from the opposite end, on touching the nerve, carried the shock through the limb, and the dog, dead as he was, sprang off the table several feet distant.

In 1806, I was present when the first spark was drawn in America from an armed magnet, connected with a galvanic battery, with which our ingenious countryman, *Isaiah Lukens*, was experimenting. And in 1834, in London, I witnessed, with *Perkins*, the immense power of the electromagnet in sustaining many hundred weight of iron. These were mere objects of curiosity; but it was then *supposed* that something useful would result, which it soon did, not only in curious operations of mechanical power, but, in the hands of our fellow-artist, *Mr. Morse*, the Electric Telegraph has been produced—the miracle of the age. Little as these Reminiscences seem to be connected with my usual subjects, they terminate in the glory of a fellow-artist.

In 1809, I painted the portrait of *Oliver Evans*, for our Gallery of distinguished men, deeming him sufficiently worthy, by his improvements in flour-mills. He was much devoted to experiments with steam-engines, and was noted for moving, by that power, a heavy lime-house, from the Centre Square to the river. He was thought to be *crazy*, because he predicted that railroads and steam-engines would not only make travelling easy and expeditious between New York and Philadelphia, but even from Boston to New Orleans. Yet I could discover in him only one symptom of *monomania*. Having failed to meet an engagement he had made with me, he called a few days after to apologize, informing me that he had been to Wilmington, and on returning found that he had forgotten his "thinking-board," which was nothing more than a plank, six feet long, two feet wide, and two inches thick, which it was his custom to place one end on the floor, the other elevated on a stool, and upon this to lie on his back, with his eyes shut, and ruminant on his inventions. Instead of coming to my painting-room, therefore, he had gone back forty miles to Wilmington, on board of a slow-moving packet-boat, to recover his plank. If this was not insanity (and some philosophers say we are all insane), it was a curious instance of the force of habit. *Fulton* also was said to be insane in predicting steam navigation; and he told me that the kind opposition of his friends had nearly made him so; but my hand was clasped in his at the moment when the effective thought burst on his mind—as I have narrated in a paper published in the Annals of the Pennsylvania Historical Society. This is another reminiscence of an artist, for *Fulton* was a very good portrait-painter.

Joshua Shaw, also, the landscape-painter, has been profitably distinguished by his improvements in guns and cannon; but chiefly by his improvement of the *swivel* diamond for cutting glass; a small instrument of more value than all the large diamonds in the world.

To artists it may be of some little interest to trace the progress of improvement from the long-continued, but now obsolete, little paint-bladders. In 1809, I made a set of thick glass tubes to hold the paint, one end stopped with a perforated cork, and the color forced out by a piston of wood. This was a clean and neat, but imperfect instrument. Mr. *C. B. King*, of Washington, improved on this, by substituting tubes of tin, with a cork piston; which we readily adopted. A sample being sent to London, Mr. *Deville*, of the Strand, still further improved by making them of brass lined with tin, and each with a top screwed on, and with a screw piston; but it was reserved for the ingenuity of another American artist, Mr. *Rand*, to invent the present compressible tubes of pure tin, without seam, effectually preserving the colors, which are pressed out of a small nozzle, having a screw cap to prevent leakage.

The lovers of Art must lament that the opportunity was lost to America for possessing the Gallery of the Cardinal *Fesch*, once offered to our government for seventy thousand dollars. This gallery was never seen so as to be fully appreciated even in Rome. Visitors were shown through his palace, the walls of every room being

covered with pictures; one room was opened to show me, and it was filled with pictures, covering the floor and piled up to the ceiling. To account for the number and excellence of his collection, it was said, that besides an occasional purchase, he obtained many that money could not buy—presented to him, in order to obtain his influence with the emperor, so as to favor the interests of noble families. When he took especial notice of a fine picture, the Cardinal soon after found it politely sent to him. When I visited his Gallery I found that it contained a great many *Andrea del Sarto's*; but, being in his dark style, I did not fully appreciate them, till the Cardinal's major-domo showed me a portfolio of beautiful crayon drawings made from them (probably subjected to a bright sunlight), executed by an amiable young man, who was introduced to me as a *protégé* of the Cardinal. I so warmly admired a fine head by Rembrandt, a portrait of his mother, which cost six thousand dollars, the custodian proudly showed me a most excellent copy by this young artist. The Cardinal was then in conclave for the election of a pope; and Charles Bonaparte had promised me, that on his release he would ask permission for me to copy some of his pictures. After the election I met the grand-nephew, who told me there was no chance of success; "because," said he, "a young man, his favorite *protégé*, has been turned out of doors for copying, as a *fac-simile*, Rembrandt's mother, contrary to a general order never to copy an entire picture." I never heard that he relented, but hope he did.

It is a well-known fact that those who stutter in talking can sing without that impediment; which is amusingly anecdoted by the parson's servant-boy entering his church, and, with great agitation, endeavoring to tell him something. "Sing it, you dog!" said the parson in the pulpit. On which the boy gave utterance, in appropriate musical notes—"The barn is a-fire! the barn is a-fire!"

Mr. *Fox*, the Philadelphia engraver, was an inveterate stammerer, and would have been rendered unsocial, but for his talent of singing. It is worthy of a passing notice in this connection, that the national song of "Hail, Columbia!" composed by Joseph Hopkinson, was first sung, and with great effect, by Mr. *Fox*, at the Chesnut Theatre, on the occasion of President Adams and family being present. It was vociferously encored, and perhaps has never been better sung.

Speaking of the theatre, reminds me of the first great visit of Indians to our Atlantic cities; they were the *Osages*, from the Rocky Mountains, a selection of about a dozen warriors of the finest athletic proportions. They were induced to make an exhibition of their war-dances at the theatre. Desirous of profiting by so rare an anatomical exhibition, the stage-box, as nearest the scene of study, was filled by artists. The squaws, or wives, were seated at the back of the stage, which left an ample space for the warriors, undraped, except by a small modesty-piece. They were without paint or any savage decorations, and as they carelessly and with graceful ease walked about the stage, in front of an immense assemblage of ladies and gentle-

men, and, according to Indian pride, manifesting no surprise at such an unprecedented display of light and costume, I was much struck with the elegance of their manly proportions—each chief being above six feet high, realizing an aggregate of the most celebrated examples of Greek sculpture. I observed many beautiful articulations which I had imagined were licences taken by the old sculptors, especially the hip, the firm pectoral and uninflated abdominal muscles. I visited them at their hotel in Market Street, where the only surprise expressed by their venerable chief was that of wonder at the vast amount of provisions which poured into that street, in the great old-fashioned Conestogo wagons, which have now disappeared, to be replaced by what would have been to him a greater wonder still—locomotives and cars.

EXTRACTS

FROM THE

DIARY OF AN ARTIST.

By *Jack Cupper*.

CHAPTER II.

January 7th, 1841.—Don't feel at home, somehow, at the R. A.—We are on drill here; and it is very different from the museum. Extraordinary weather: it is hard frost, the thermometer now 11° F.

January 8th.—Academy dismally other than I anticipated. Students intent on material—asked by one of them, "how I got my outline so fine with charcoal!" Says, "it's very wonderful! he, for his part, prefers brushing it in, freely, with several lines, seeing the effect, and then *breading out* the wrong ones." This may be right, but I shall not follow it.

Worked this morning at the Germanicus: attitude real and thoughtful, but insipid execution of flesh—cold, like the School, which is intolerable! Hot enough to-night, however, wedged in on both sides with students, and sitting under the gas!

Shall I be able to work at this gentle art, opposed by such violences of fire, ice, and humanity? Where are my dreamings of June last on the sun-bright acropolis—the secret meaning of form—the principle to be got out of Heroes, Demi-gods, Fauns, Dryads, Oreads? Thought of them to-night in the old museum style—the first time since I have been at the R. A.—it was the gas blazing upon that statue, with the cymbals in his hands. The students' whistling, too, suppressed all at once, put me in mind of cicadas. That dark recess had a chapel of the nymphs in it—buzz, buzz—"Hyblæis apibus!"—Tempe was coming—only my neighbor's drawing-board was under mine, and down I come with a snap! Then a solid cold fog to go home in. (Note.—All things look larger in a fog, all things but lights: the gas-lamps look smaller, the lamp-posts higher.) Headache—to bed. Saturday, 9th.—Stand on Westminster Bridge, this morning, looking at the ice in the river. Many stagnant sheets in the centre, but channels on each side, where ice-fragments drive on, gridding and whistling. Droll to see one of these—a great one (of the cold school) come up with a score of little ones after him, run his nose into a fissure, and then turn